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COMMUNICATION

FROM THE

Pennsylvania

Secretary of the Commonwealth,

UNDER A RESOLUTION OF 9TH JANUARY LAST,

RELATIVE TO

EDUCATING POOR CHILDREN,

WITHIN THIS COMMONWEALTH.

READ IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
MARCH 16, 1833.

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HARRISBURG:
PRINTED BY HENRY WELSH.

1833.

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REPORT, &c.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF THE COMMONWEALTH,
Harrisburg, March 15, 1833.

To the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

SIR—In compliance with a resolution of the House of Representatives of the 9th January last, "That the Secretary of the Commonwealth be requested to obtain, from the commissioners of the several counties of this state, a statement, to be laid before this House at as early a day as possible, of the number of children schooled at public expense in each county for the last four years, together with the sums annually expended for their instruction during those years, designating the number instructed in Lancasterian schools, with such other information in relation to the state of education in Pennsylvania as he may deem useful and important," a circular letter was, on the same day, addressed to the commissioners of each county in the commonwealth, desiring that an immediate communication might be made to this department, embracing a detail of the information required by the resolution. On the 5th and the 25th ultimo, repeated applications were made to the commissioners of those counties from which no replies had been received up to those respective dates. I transmit with this communication, a tabular abstract of the reports so far as received.

In the forty-nine counties heard from, the average number of children returned under the act of the 4th of April, 1809, during the year 1829, was 15,002. The amount expended under provisions of the same act, was $46,850 54½. In the year 1830, the number returned was 15,839—the amount expended, $51,859 10½. In the year 1831, the number returned was 17,224—the amount expended, $52,331 40½. And in the year 1832, the number returned was 17,467—the amount expended, $48,466 25.

Under the second and last clause of the resolution of the House, which directs the Secretary to communicate "such other information in relation to the state of education in Pennsylvania, as he may deem useful and important," I have prepared and send herewith, a schedule of universities, colleges, and academies created by our laws, all, or nearly all of which have been, from time to time, liberally endowed by donations in money from the treasury and grants from the public domain, designating the year in which they were severally instituted, amounting to two universities, eight colleges, and fifty-five academies; and I take occasion here to remark,

that it will be found, on examination, that no other branch of the public interest has produced more frequent and voluminous legislation, than that of education. The numerous acts on this subject would make a volume of considerable size, and yet it may well be doubted whether any important matter of public concernment has been less benefitted by the direct action of the government; and it is a lamentable fact that, at this advanced period, Pennsylvania is without a general system of free schools *established by law*, agreeably to the constitution. By a reference to the statute books, it will be found that all public grants for the purposes of education, in Pennsylvania, whether in shape of money or land, prior to 1831, have been exclusively confined to institutions, accessible to the rich alone. Without questioning the constitutionality or general expediency of this course, I may nevertheless be permitted to say that, to my mind, the practice which has partially obtained since the year 1795, in the endowment of colleges, academies, &c. to annex a condition that a few poor children should be taught for a limited period, free from expense, ought to be considered rather as an apology for the postponement of a palpable duty, than the fulfilment of a wise and humane provision of the constitution, which says that "the Legislature shall, as soon as conveniently may be, provide by law for the establishment of schools throughout the state, in such manner that the poor may be taught gratis."

The people, the true source of all power, have, in the constitution, which is the work of their hands, ordained and decreed that the "arts and sciences shall be promoted in one or more seminaries of learning;" this wholesome provision was promptly complied with; at an early period of the government, institutions devoted to the higher branches of education were established, and have been endowed at public expense, at various times, in all not much less than half a million of dollars; and whatever difference of opinion may exist as to the manner in which those funds have been managed, I know of no one who has questioned the constitutionality of the grants.

The people have also, in the same constitution, ordained and decreed, "that schools shall be established by law throughout the state, in such manner that the poor may be taught gratis"—this has been neglected. There is no law in Pennsylvania that provides for the establishment of schools throughout the state, nor has there been a dollar granted from the public treasury for the exclusive purpose of educating the poor. "The poor may be taught gratis"—this is the poor man's boon, and, save his personal privileges, it may be called his only constitutional heritage. The rich *may* work, but the poor *must* work or suffer; the wealthy may hire his substitute, but the poor man, in time of war, *must* fight the battles of his country; and is it not right, is it not just, as it is constitutional, that his children should be taught gratis? It is the industrious poor, taken as a class, who are the real producers of the necessaries and comforts of social life; it is the labouring man

who daily adds to the common mass of material wealth, though he receive of it himself only a mere pittance. If the maxim be true, that knowledge is power, and liberty itself but a precarious blessing without it, then its general diffusion becomes the common interest of all our citizens, in proportion to the extent each may have, personal and pecuniary, to defend and protect. Intelligence may, then, be considered the mental commonwealth, and of course, of universal interest; and it is believed, by the most experienced, that the only plan that can effectually reach that class intended to be provided for by the constitution, is the system of general free schools, where all may meet for the attainment of this great object of common interest, without the legal recognition of the odious distinction of "rich and poor." Owing to the imaginary degradation arising from this distinction, it is believed, of the whole number of poor, not exceeding two hundred, which are provided for in colleges and academies, a still less number are found willing to accept benefits on terms thus humiliating. Would it not, then, be better that all distinctions calculated to produce comparative degradation, be unknown to our laws, especially in reference to the subject of mental improvement? and from hence, let it be diligently taught, that the improvement of the mind is not alone the subject of individual enterprise in a free government, but that intelligence and freedom are to each other as cause and effect, and let it be a part of our system, to teach the true relation that exists between knowledge and liberty; and that as the happiness of man, simple man, is the ultimate and legitimate end of all government, so ought it to be the all-engrossing attention and constant effort of all who govern, to make man, collective man, wise and virtuous, to the end that he may be happy.

Every days' experience demonstrates, and all history teaches, that in the same ratio that education and knowledge has been disseminated among the great mass of community, it has demanded, and generally obtained, political freedom; and thus have been reared, from time to time, the ramparts of liberty against the encroachments of tyranny: and as the spread of knowledge has given birth to civil liberty, so is its increase and extension necessary to give it character and durability; and after all, man will be more or less the creature of circumstance. From the very nature of things, inequality in society will exist, but let it be as nearly graded as is compatible with human nature itself; let not the rights and enjoyments of the opulent be disturbed; at the same time let native talent have due credit for bursting the chains of indigence; let rational piety and true virtue be cherished, although they be found in the humblest walks of life, and let them receive their proper rank; but let not all the honours due to these be lavished on favoured objects, enfeebled by that indolence which is too frequently the concomitant of affluence, merely because the chance that gave them birth, bestowed also the right to hereditary wealth.

Under the specious title of "An act to provide for the education

of the poor gratis," is the law of the 4th April, 1809, and from which we derive the only general authority in reference to the education of the poor as a state system, and which has generally proved as abortive in its operation, as it is delusive in its title. This law provides, that all children between the ages of five and twelve years, whose parents are unable to pay for their schooling, may be sent to the most convenient school, to be paid for out of the county funds. This system, while it compels the recipient of its benefits first to record his own stigma, and recognises, in their most exceptionable forms, the distinction of rich and poor, carefully avoids the appropriation of a dollar out of the public treasury for the education of the poor; and though it has been contended by some that this law does all that the constitution requires, it is flagrantly deficient in its most essential feature, viz. "the establishment of schools throughout the state." It may be proper here to remark, that the number of poor children exhibited by this report, as having been returned by the different assessors throughout the state, furnishes no just criterion of the number who have been actually taught, or of the portion of time each may have been at school, it being well ascertained that on account of the supposed disgrace which attaches to acknowledged poverty, many poor children who ought to be, are not returned, and many who are returned, do not go to school at all, and others very irregularly.

That this system has materially failed to produce the contemplated and desired results, is clearly evinced by public opinion uniting in its condemnation; as specimens of which, I insert below various extracts from letters elicited under the resolution of the House.

The commissioners of one county, in giving their statement, say—"The present system is decidedly bad, and the teachers, with very few exceptions, worse than the system."

Another report says—"We have no schools on the Lancasterian plan, in this county, and it is deeply to be regretted that, from the manner in which our common schools are conducted, not only the education of those children whose parents are able to pay for their tuition, but of the poor children, is in a deplorable condition."

A third says—"That it (the present system) is a system of prodigality and wasteful extravagance, a real burden upon the people, without accomplishing, in any reasonable manner, the end intended."

A fourth—"The system of education in this county, is deplorably bad, and calls loudly for reform."

A fifth says—"The commissioners would beg leave to observe, that the present system is very defective, as well as expensive, and that it does not answer the purpose for which it was established; because the modest and unassuming poor do not avail themselves of the benefits of the system, on account of the odium that is by some attached to the present mode of education, which creates a distinction between the rich and the poor, not con-

sistent with the freedom of our republican institutions, and operates very frequently to the defeat of the constitutional object,—the education of the poor at the public expense. And it is a further objection, made by many of our intelligent citizens, to the present system, that no provision is made for enquiring into the qualifications, moral and literary, of the persons employed as teachers. They would therefore suggest, through you, to the Legislature, the propriety of changing the present mode of educating the poor, for one more congenial to the feeling of this republican commonwealth, and introduce in lieu thereof, a system of common school instruction similar to that of our eastern states, or such an one as they in their wisdom shall think calculated to do away the odious system now in use."

It will be perceived, that the introduction of the Lancasterian or monitorial system of instruction, continues to be retarded. This fact must necessarily be a source of much regret; and, when it is recollected that five children may receive all the benefits of schooling upon this plan, at the same cost that it requires to educate two upon the system in general use, cannot but excite surprise.

It cannot fail of being a source of the sincerest pleasure and exultation to every patriot and philanthropist, to witness the representatives of the people engaging in this great work of mental improvement, with a zeal and earnestness designed to elevate the character of man, and the precursor of countless blessings to after generations. The grand impediment to the commencement of a general system of free schools in Pennsylvania, hitherto, may be fairly chargeable to the want of a distinct fund for that purpose, and the fear of meeting the responsibility of adopting measures for its creation and accumulation. The obstacle has at length been in a great measure removed, by the act of the 2d April, 1831, providing for a general system of education, which sets apart as a common school fund, the proceeds arising from unpatented lands, fees in the land offices, and all monies received in pursuance of the provisions of the fourth section of an act to increase the county rates and levies for the use of the commonwealth, passed the twenty-fifth day of March, 1831, the proceeds of which will, on the 2d of April next, amount to not less than three hundred and four thousand dollars. This sum, with the amount annually accruing, under the provisions of the act aforesaid, is chargeable upon the internal improvement fund, at a compound interest of 5 per cent. until it shall annually amount to at least $100,000. Assuming, in some measure, the operation of the law for the present year, as the basis, this sum will be at the disposal of the Legislature, for the promotion of free schools throughout the state, on or about the 1st of April, 1839. This fund, from which we may fondly anticipate great and lasting benefits, owes its origin to the unceasing exertions of the present Chief Magistrate, who, in his memorable message of the 14th January, 1830, in giving to the General Assembly

"information of the state of the commonwealth," among other things, urged its formation in the strongest terms. The self-accumulating principles contained in our present system for raising a school fund for the promotion of popular education, which imposes a merely nominal tax of only one-tenth part of a cent on a dollar of the assessed valuation of taxable property, and which is applied immediately for purposes of internal improvement, and pledged ultimately for the promotion of free schools throughout the commonwealth, if perpetuated and the Legislature should deem it right, from and after the year 1839, to convert the means for raising a school fund agreeably to the provisions of the act of the 2d of April, 1831, into a school revenue, making a moderate allowance for the increase of the assessed valuation of property, cannot fail of producing a sum not less than three hundred thousand dollars per annum; which sum, added to one hundred thousand, being the interest at five per cent. arising from the fund of not less than two millions of dollars, which will be then accumulated, would place at the disposal of the Legislature, for the purposes of free schools, from and after the year 1840, from this source alone, a sum not less than four hundred thousand dollars per annum, with the probable increase of revenue equal to the increased demand consequent upon the increase of population. Such a state of things, it is believed, would place Pennsylvania on an equal, if not more favorable position, as the patron of popular education, than has been exhibited by any other state in the Union in so limited a period and by a process so simple and easy.

It seems to be generally admitted, by those who have turned their attention to the subject, that the state of New York has in operation decidedly the most comprehensive and efficient system of general education, regulated by law. that is now extant. The first attempt in that state to raise a school fund was made in 1795, by means of small annual appropriations from the state treasury, and like all other important and beneficial innovations, met at first with fierce opposition, arising from the prejudices of early and confirmed habit. The spirit of enlightened liberality however prevailed, and in 1805 a more solid foundation for the magnificent superstructure she has since raised, was laid by the passage of a law for setting apart the net proceeds of the sales of five hundred thousand acres of unappropriated public land, to form a "permanent fund for the support of common schools," to which was added in the same year three thousand shares of bank stock owned by the state, with a provision that no distribution to its ultimate object should be made until the annual interest should amount to a sum not less than fifty thousand dollars; since which, various other sources, such as quit rents, fees of clerks of certain courts, proceeds arising from the sale of certain town lots, have been added to the fund. In 1811 and 12, measures were taken to organize pursuant to law, a general system of common schools, and the first distribution of money under its provisions was made in 1816,

amounting to $55,720 98. An all important effect produced by the benevolence and liberality of the government of that state, and which example I have no doubt would be followed by our own citizens under similar circumstances is, that each school district raises by means of tax or voluntary contribution for school purposes, a sum not less, and frequently much greater, than that granted by the state.

Since 1816, the number of children taught, and the amount of money expended under their present system, have regularly increased, until, in the last year, 1832, we have the sublime spectacle of 507,105 pupils, without distinction, receiving regular and constant instruction, upon uniform principles, under the direct supervision of the government, at an expense of about one million of dollars, or not much exceeding two dollars per scholar; whilst Pennsylvania, for the same year, with equal wealth and a population not vastly inferior in number to that of New York, presents the lamentable contrast of 17,467 children, not educated, but returned as subjects entitled to receive instruction, under a system condemned by universal public opinion and experience, and that too at an expense of $48,466 25. The impolicy of our past legislation is not on account of the amount expended, so much as the multiplicity of institutions upon which it has been bestowed, without system and without effect. If the public bounty, to the amount before mentioned, had been judiciously confined to a limited number of seminaries for instructing the higher branches, and the energies of the state properly applied to the promotion of common free schools, the beneficial results at this day would be incalculable. Error becomes criminal, when persisted in contrary to the lights of reason and experience; and whatever may extenuate for want of precedence and analogy in the past, nothing can justify a similar course in future. Every thing proves to us that we have greatly erred, and it is now the highest virtue to retract and "do our works over"—revise our early efforts, and adopt some system, the general usefulness of which shall shew, that we have profited by the lessons of experience.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

SAMUEL M'KEAN.

On motion,

Ordered, That three thousand copies in the English, and two thousand in the German language, of this report, be printed for distribution.

Extract from the Journal,

FRS. R. SHUNK, Clerk.

List of Universities, Colleges and Academies, in Pennsylvania, with the date of their institution.

University of Pennsylvania,		A. D. 1755
Western University,		1820
Dickinson College,		1783
Franklin	"	1787
Jefferson	"	1802
Washington	"	1806
Allegheny	"	1815
La Fayette	"	1826
Madison	"	1827
Pennsylvania	"	1832
Germantown Academy,		1784
Pittsburg	"	1787
Philadelphia Episcopal Academy,		ib.
Reading	"	1788
Newtown	"	1790
York	"	1799
Chambersburg	"	ib.
Beaver	"	1803
Northumberland	"	1804
Norristown	"	ib.
Easton	"	1805
Bellefonte	"	ib.
Greersburg	"	1806
Wilkesbarre	"	1807
Meadville	"	ib.
Harrisburg	"	1809
Greensburg	"	1810
Somerset	"	ib.
Gettysburg	"	ib.
Bedford	"	ib.
Greene	"	ib.
Butler	"	ib.
Chester	"	1811
Mercer	"	ib.
Williamsport	"	ib.
Erie	"	ib.
Waterford	"	ib.
Loller	"	1812
Venango	"	ib.
Delaware	"	1813
Beachwood	"	ib.
Franklin	"	ib.
Athens	"	ib.
Orwigsburg	"	ib.
Allentown	"	ib.

Indiana	Academy	1814
Stroudsburg	"	ib.
Lewistown	"	ib.
Lebanon	"	1816
Huntingdon	"	ib.
Susquehanna	"	ib.
Wellsborough	"	1817
Danville	"	1818
Ebensburg	"	1819
Kittanning	"	1821
Warren	"	1822
Strasburg	"	1823
Clearfield	"	1827
Milford	"	ib.
Mifflinsburg	"	ib.
Union	"	ib.
Lancaster	"	ib.
Smethsport	"	1829
Le Raysville	"	1830
Dundaff	"	ib.

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